DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 187 143 FL 011 392

AUTHOR	Spolsky, Bernard
TITLE	Overcoming the Language Barrier to Education. CATESOL Occasional Papers, No. 5.
INSTITUTION	California Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
PUB DATE	79
NOTE	8p.; Revised version of a paper presented at the CATESOL Annual Meeting (San Francisco, CA, March 1978).
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Bilingual Education; Bilingual Students; Cognitive Style; Curriculum; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; English (Second Language); *Language Maintenance; Language of Instruction; *Language Variation; Learning Modalities; Navajo; *Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; Sociolinguistics; Standard Spoken Usage; *Teacher Role; *Teaching Methods; Written Language
IDENTIFIERS	Maori (People)

ABSTRACT

The relationship between teaching English to speakers of other languages and bilingual education is explored through three dimensions in language education: participants, channels, and codes. Language barriers to education can be found in each of these. As student participants become more numerous and more linguistically diverse, the educational system, geared for one language, falters. Participant teachers often do not speak the language of their students. The traditional channels for education (reading and writing), haven't considered the oral tradition of many children's pre-school education. The language code used in school, the standard dialect, is often not the variety used at home. To overcome these barriers, educators must: (1) recognize that the school does teach the child a new language or variety, (2) recognize that the learner is a fluent speaker of some language, (3) respect the value of the new variety being taught, (4) respect and strengthen mastery of the home variety or language and (5) ensure that the new curriculum and methods don't challenge or limit the respect due the old. (PMJ)

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California Association - Teachers of
English to Speakers of Other Languages

CATESOL Occasional Papers
Number 5 (Fall, 1979)

ED187143

OVERCOMING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER TO EDUCATION

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My topic today is the relationship between the teaching of English to speakers of other languages and the field of bilingual education. It seems there is a dichotomous choice that has to be made between bilingual education and teaching English to speakers of other languages in the development of language education policy. But, in fact, it is not a real choice, for there is a close relationship between the two. Bilingual education is concerned with two languages, one of which is English. In the same way, TESOL is concerned with "SOL" speakers of other languages.

When I started teaching, it was on the east coast of New Zealand in a high school where about 20% of the students were Maoris. I had never heard about teaching of English to speakers of other languages, but I noticed that a good number of the students in my class seemed to have quite serious problems. It worried me that very little of my training as an English teacher had prepared me to face up to the problems that these students were having expressing themselves in English. It was out of that experience that I got involved for the first time in teaching English as a second language.

When I came to New Mexico, I suddenly became, in a very real sense, in touch with the speakers of other languages. I discovered I was living in a state where 50% of the population came from non-English backgrounds. Moreover, I was living in close contact with communities, such as some of the Pueblo Indian villages, that have lived in exactly the same site since about the year 1100. I became quickly conscious of the fact that I was living in what could reasonably be considered somebody else's land, a land with its own history. Those two situations, that first realization that some of the students I was teaching in New Zealand had problems learning from me because I had not been trained to recognize their language background, which led me to English as a second language, and the experience in New Mexico where I saw the relevance of the other language, the other culture, the other tradition, provided the basis for some of the things I want to discuss.

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Let me try to define why I think this is such an important issue, and so central to the problems we face in education today. A linguist can claim, quite reasonably, to be involved with one of the most important phenomena associated with human beings, for language is central to human society. We cannot conceive of human society without language, and so the business of acquiring a language becomes one of the most central steps in socialization. If you want to become a full-fledged productive member of the society you live in, you have to learn that society's language and the rules that govern how and when it must be used. The Navajo child brought up in a hogan on the Reservation can manage well with Navajo until he first comes into contact with the English-speaking domains, but if he is going to acquire a formal education, and have a chance at economic

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A revised version of this address was given at the 1978 CATESOL Annual Meeting in San Francisco.

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success he will need to add English to his linguistic repertoire. At the same time, if the child is not going to be cut off from his own family, from his own tradition, from his own society, from his own past, he must have the opportunity to keep up and develop the command of his mother tongue.

When a middle class English-speaking child goes to school in a society where the standard language is English, he does not have too much trouble with the break between home language and school language. There are some problems about the rules, like learning there are times in school not to talk. A child who comes to school and has to learn not just those special rules, but also complex new styles of language and a new channel for communication and a new language, is facing a much more serious task. A great deal of any child's education in school is concerned with modifying his language--enriching, adding, suppressing.

Children spend a great deal of time in language learning. Much of this language learning is quite informal. It is left to the unorganized activities of such amateurs as parents and brothers and sisters. This informal learning is possible because of an innate language learning propensity that permits every normal child to learn the language to which he is exposed. Informal language learning is not as unstructured as people once thought; all children learn--in more or less the same order--the main rules of their language. All children, whatever their cultural or linguistic or social background, develop basic control of the sound system and the grammar of their language by about the time that society is ready to provide them with formal instruction in schools. By the age of four or five, most children are capable of communicating in their own language, using it for purposes that they have already experienced. There is still a huge amount for them to learn. They need still to learn more styles of speech in their own language, to learn how to address different kinds of people, to learn how to communicate different kinds of notions, and, of course, to learn great numbers of new words for all the new concepts that they keep meeting. But, by the time the child is ready to start formal education, a great deal of time and effort has already been invested in mastering language.

There are some cases in which the whole of an individual's language and speech acquisition is left to informal activities, but it is much more often the case that society makes some effort to formalize the education of its young. To do this, it designates certain times and places for these activities. It says learning does not take place all the time but at special times, such as in the winter, or as we believe, from 8:15 to 3:20 Monday through Friday. Further, it appoints certain people to be responsible for passing on the various areas of traditional knowledge and values, among which language and speech play an extremely important role. Formal education ranges in complexity from the seemingly very simple system where a parent or a grandparent is expected to train a child in its tradition to a modern technological society where the institutions we have are inordinately varied, with community colleges and junior colleges and school districts and unified school districts and private schools and public schools and state schools and semi-public schools, and countless other institutions. The basic structure remains pretty well the same in all those models. A teacher, chosen for his or her expert knowledge, spends a certain amount of time with learners to pass on to them certain areas of this knowledge. Among the Navajo, for instance, on winter nights the grandfathers would tell coyote tales around the stove in the hogan. These tales were more than stories, for they included all the values that it was important to pass on to the younger children. This institution was destroyed by the boarding schools which took Navajo children away from home in the winter. They sent them back home in the summer, but

summer is not the appropriate time for grandparents to tell these stories. The traditional Maori schools of learning were concerned not with general education but with the passing on of esoteric knowledge to train the priesthood. At appropriate times (and with Maoris it was also in the winter) a group of three experts would gather together a group of eight or fewer male students who had been selected from the best families for their powers of memorization, teach them the traditional knowledge, and train them to become guardians of that knowledge.

Our concern today is with language education. In describing this, the three important dimensions are the participants (who is it who is involved in education?), the channel (reading and writing), the codes (differences of language or differences of language variety). If we look at these dimensions, we start to understand some of the conflict that leads to the language barriers to education.

Let's talk first about the participants. Who is to be educated? Each society makes its own decision as to which members of the society are to be educated. There is a broad range from universal, on the one hand, to elite, on the other. If education is universal, it is believed that everybody in the society should receive the same amount of basic education. How far basic education should go varies from society to society. In modern times, most societies accept the idea that an elementary education of six years is the basic minimum everybody should receive. The more advanced technological societies assume that everyone should go through secondary level and receive ten or twelve years' schooling. There are some educators who argue that everybody has the right even to tertiary education, to a college level of education. In a system with selection, there are various criteria used; among these, the most common has been sex, with the assumption in most societies that males and females require different kinds and amounts of education. We've started to question this now. Equally common throughout the world is the notion of elite education in which case, selection is sometimes on the basis of descent (the children of the aristocracy), wealth (those people who can afford it), race, religion, intellectual qualification, and very often a mixture of all of these. The traditional Maori schools of learning I mentioned assumed that education was restricted to males who were members of the better families, and among them the men with the ability to memorize.

The effect of selection or non-selection on language education is very critical. As long as one is dealing with a system that, for whatever reason, decides to choose its students carefully from the social group with the highest status, there is likely to be homogeneity between the language of the home and the language of the school. Once the school is opened up to all, as soon as one accepts the notion of universal education and equal opportunity, then there is an increase not just in the numbers of students we have to deal with, but in the number of languages, dialects, and varieties that are brought into the school by the pupils. I think there is good reason to believe that many of the failures that we attribute to modern education can, in large measure, be attributed to the rapid increase in the number of pupils, and the subsequent linguistic heterogeneity introduced into the school. This is not because the languages brought in are inferior in any sense, but because these languages are different, speakers of the other languages do badly in a system that in the past has been geared for speakers of the status variety.

A second aspect of the participant dimension is the teacher. To the Maori, the material taught was so important that they regarded the people who knew it as sacred. The word Tohunga in Maori refers equally to a priest, an expert, or

a teacher in the school of learning. On the other hand, in Rome most of the teachers were Greek slaves; in east European Jewish communities, with all the importance given to education, the melamed was considered a hardworking drudge. How can we place the modern status of the teacher? As a lower civil servant, he or she is presumably a compromise of some kind between slave and priest. In some societies, then, the teachers are considered as elite guardians of an esoteric body of knowledge and also of a secret language. In modern society, one of the interesting things that has happened with mass education is that teachers tend to be members of the lower middle class. Becoming a school teacher is one of the ways to start climbing socially. The school teacher in our society, like the school, occupies a key position between the masses and the elite group. One of school's key tasks, then, is to teach linguistic and other social mannerisms required for entry into the higher social levels. The teacher's own position thus produces a very real tension that is passed on to the children. The example I'll give you is from the Navajo case again. The few Navajos who in the past managed to get through college and so become qualified as teachers, did so essentially by learning English, and at the same time by giving up their traditional values. Those few who make it in spite of the system tend to be quite intolerant of suggestions that it might be wise to continue teaching in Navajo or bilingually.

From the point of view of participants, an educational system can turn out to be linguistically homogeneous or heterogeneous. One key question in a multilingual situation is whether the teacher is capable of communicating with the students. The first kind of language barrier arises in those systems where the teacher doesn't speak the same language as the child. Before education can start, one of them must learn the language of the other. A language education policy that ignores this fact will create considerable hardship, and that essentially has been the case in Navajo education. Most Navajo children still come to school not speaking English. They come to schools where most of the class don't speak English, and, until a few years ago, almost all of their teachers spoke only English and knew not a word of Navajo. That clearly is the first kind of language barrier that one has to overcome.

Let me look at a second dimension--channel. In a preliterate society, education must be completely oral. In the oral system, what usually happens is that you go to school to learn the traditional knowledge, usually by learning it by heart or trying to recreate its content in some kind of appropriate formulas. Memorizing power is extremely important in preliterate societies. Among the Maoris, for example, one was said to know 406 songs that included all important historical knowledge. Another was able to trace his descent through 56 generations, giving details about all branch relationships, all the extra-tribal marriages, and a genealogical table with 1,400 names on it. Memory is extremely important in a preliterate society.

When writing is introduced, things change. The school's first task in a literate society is to teach reading and writing, and the written language becomes the special preserve of the school. When the child first comes to school, he is taught his letters. In a literate society, school, books, and education are virtually synonymous.

The written language is often quite different from the spoken language. During the middle ages and later, Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Hebrew, and Classical Arabic were all being written and taught in school although they were no longer being used as spoken languages. There were medieval Jewish communities, for example, with close to 100 percent male literacy in Hebrew, and although no one

actually spoke Hebrew, no other language was ever written. In these cases, then, there was a major gap between the written language and the spoken language. Even when the written language is a reflection of the spoken language of the children, there are likely to be considerable differences between the two. To take a child from one variety to the other is considered difficult. It is usually considered in teaching reading, for instance, that we should give children simplified materials to read; but it is often not noticed that even these simplified materials are still quite different from the language the child speaks.

The emphasis on the written language in schools and its difference from the the spoken language produces a second kind of language barrier to education for many children. Problems in the teaching of reading have produced a major group of educational failures. For a long time, reading and education were so closely tied together that essentially we considered it the only business of the school. But now that we are living in a postliterate electronic age, things are different. Now that we can communicate over long distances and over time using the human voice, the spoken language has become respectable again. In language education, the effect has been clear--radios, tape recorders, and telephones have made oral recitation in class and oral second language teaching methods acceptable in the twentieth century when they were not in the nineteenth century. Television and typewriters have challenged traditional reading and writing, placing them in new perspectives and calling for a different approach to teaching. Radio and television use much more elaborate varieties in their conversation, but they allow speech that is much more relaxed than is required for writing. The new media, then, are serving to mitigate the harshness of the distinction between the spoken language of the home and the written language that is the mark of the school.

The third dimension I want to talk about is code, the choice of language variety by the school. What language or languages, dialect or dialects is the school going to use as its medium of instruction, and what language or languages should it teach? The possibilities are quite complex. A school system can do all its teaching in one language or in more than one. The school can intend to maintain its students in the use of their first language, then add a second, and transfer them from the use of one language to another. Or it can intend that its students master two or more languages, choosing to make each language equal for all purposes, or it can choose to make them different in status and use. Most schools in the United States, for instance, do all their teaching in English and devote a small amount of time to teaching foreign languages such as French, Spanis or Russian, for limited uses such as reading the literature in the first or reading about travel or general culture. There are other schools that aim to competence in a second language. The Lycee Francais in New York aims to produce elite bilinguals. The Yiddish or Hebrew day schools aim at competence in the second or third language. With the political and financial backing of the various bilingua education acts, we now have schools that are starting to cater to speakers of oth languages, providing, at least, the first few grades of education in another language while children are being transferred to English. Some of the schools on th Navajo Reservation have started to do some teaching in Navajo, and there is talk of maintaining it through the school system so that graduates may have equal competence in both languages.

Through all the complexity of choice there is a much ignored general truth Looking at the world as a whole, it is an exception rather than a rule that a ch comes to school already speaking the language or variety that the school conside to be ideal. Schools either teach in or teach the standard dialect of the stanc language. For various reasons, this is seldom the variety spoken at home by mos people, and this produces the third and major language barrier to education. Th

language the child was acquiring informally while he was growing up is not the same as the language that the school expects him to acquire formally. The worst feature of this problem is that the task is often not noticed. It was clearer in those societies and during those times in which everybody assumed that children coming to school had to learn a classical language--when English speaking children came to school and everybody said they had to learn Latin or when Roman children came to school and everybody said they had to learn Greek. First of all, the students were carefully selected and, secondly, the school recognized the difficulty of learning another language. To learn a classical language took time and effort and only a few people would be really successful.

The teaching of standard languages and varieties has been less successful first because it is intended for so many people and, second because its difficulty has been ignored. Teachers and educational systems have assumed that every child already speaks the standard language or variety. It has been, and still is common, for children to come to school and be classified as mentally retarded because they fail educational tests given in a language they don't know, or for them to have to sit for years in a classroom where the teacher ignores the fact that the whole of the class speaks a language that they cannot, or for them to be treated as stupid because their dialect is not the standard dialect that the teacher and the school aim towards.

The situation on the Navajo Reservation has been a very sad and very obvious example of this. After the end of the second World War, more and more Navajo children came to school so that by about 1950 most children of school age were actually in school. In 1970 about 90 per cent of the Navajo children beginning school didn't know enough English to use it in any way, but the curriculum ignored this almost completely until about 1970 when there was some attempt to add ESL courses. When ESL was added to the curriculum, it consisted of a set of drills taught for half an hour a day, after which the class would go on with the normal school work. I once walked into a class that was having English as a second language. It was a seventh grade, and they were doing drills out of the first book of the Miami Readers. At the end of the drills, the teacher said, "Now put away your ESL books and take out your English composition books." They took out a seventh grade English composition book and the lesson continued. Given a language education policy that completely ignored the existence of the language barrier to education, it is no wonder that the average Navajo child dropped behind normal school achievement, and that he lagged further behind the longer he was in school. It is not just that school is a place that teaches language; even more significant is that most of its teaching takes place through language. Most of its learning depends on the pupil's ability to understand his teachers and the books that they give to the class. Learning depends on interaction--interaction between learner and teacher, and learner and book. All the time that there is a language barrier, that there is no communication between teacher and pupils, there is little chance of effective education taking place.

Against this background of language barriers that faulty language educational policy has set up for so many children, I think we can better appraise some of the steps to overcoming these barriers. There are six which I think are significant. The first is to recognize the nature of our task, to recognize that school is usually involved in teaching a child a new language or variety. The second step is to recognize the nature of the learner. The learner, the child in school or the adult immigrant is usually a fluent speaker of some usable variety of language and is capable of communicating in that variety effectively. The third step is to respect the value of the new variety or language one is teaching. Usually the variety being taught is the standard language, a well developed language pro-

viding access to modern technology, modern knowledge, the modern world, and so very important to the learner. The fourth point is that, at the same time, one must respect the value of the home variety. The home variety, at the very least, is essential for the child to provide that human connection to his home and background and community, and very often is also a way of providing access to a long and important tradition with its own literature, its own culture, its own religious values, its own moral values. The home variety, therefore, deserves just as much respect as the new, school variety. These two points lead to the next: the method of teaching and curriculum. The approach adopted must make sure that the teaching of the new variety doesn't challenge or limit the respect due to the old. One of the worst things we can do when we're teaching somebody a new language is to suggest that our students are handicapped or bad or ignorant or foolish simply because they don't speak the new variety. It makes a great deal of sense, and this is the sixth point, that language education policy, whenever it reasonably can, should encourage strengthening mastery of the home variety.

I said at the very beginning that we are concerned with one of the most critical problems facing education today. It is not so much a choice between bilingual education and TESOL, or between English and Spanish, or English and Navajo, or Russian and Georgian, or between the English or Anglo or whatever term one has to use for non-ethnics and ethnic, or just a choice between modernism and traditionalism. For the last 400 years, modernism has been taking over the world. In this time, we have developed technology, television, cities, mass society, computers, large apartment buildings, freeways. We have now noticed that modernism is flawed: we notice the destruction of the environment and the destruction of the individual. One suggested answer is to go back to traditionalism, to give up and go back to what life was like before, but this is not such a good answer. It is fine to have traditional values, but it's hard to have to carry water for three miles every day as many traditional Navajos do. It is good to live in a village, but it's hard to live so far away from medical help. So traditionalism isn't the answer either. The answer has to be some kind of new post-modern blend. Exactly what it's going to be like is hard to see, but when we are talking about bilingual education and TESOL in the sense I'm talking about it, we are starting to explore this blend. We are talking about an educational policy that, if it's called bilingual education, recognizes that there are two languages involved and one of them is English; or if it's called TESOL, recognizes that all the time we're teaching English, we're teaching it to speakers of other languages.